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SUBJECT: DRC AND SOUTH AFRICA SIGN AID ACCORDS AT FOURTH
BINATIONAL COMMISSION

¶1. (U) Congolese and South African ministers signed accords on South African assistance to Congo's transportation and health sectors at the conclusion of Bi-national Commission meetings August 21. They also signed a declaration of intent regarding South African support for reform of the Congolese army (FARDC). The meetings marked the first summit of Presidents Kabila and Mbeki since DRC elections in 2006 and were the fourth for the commission since its inception in ¶2004.

¶2. (U) In a joint declaration issued August 21, Kabila and Mbeki referred to Kabila's five-pillar government program: health, education, employment, electricity, water, and infrastructure. The transportation accord addresses civil aviation, navigation, transportation infrastructure, road security, and transportation technology. The health accord includes provisions on short term hospital management and medical specialist exchanges. The accords emphasized "the reinforcement of human capacities and institutions" and such "urgent tools for stabilization" as reform of the security sector. The declaration noted the two leaders discussed common interests and bilateral, regional, and international concerns. It also stated that a sub-commission would meet twice yearly for follow-up and evaluation.

¶3. (U) The Kabila-Mbeki meeting was preceded by a ministerial August 20 and experts meetings August 16-19. Thirteen ministers, nearly all of Mbeki's cabinet, attended the meetings, which were chaired by Foreign Ministers Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Press reports indicate that the sessions also focused on evaluation of 28 existing bilateral accords. Although the agreements date as far back as August 2004, only six have been ratified by the Congo. Mbusa promised that the DRC would speed up the ratification process and said "the Congolese government recommits to have these agreements ratified by Parliament."

¶4. (U) The French text of the joint declaration has been sent to AF/C.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. Relations between the RDC and South Africa are clearly intensifying. South African manufactured goods are increasingly available throughout the DRC, to the chagrin of European exporters. The South Africans are also believed to exercise considerable political influence here, much of it behind the scenes. This visit is the latest in a series of high-profile encounters between Congolese authorities and African counterparts and comes on the heels of presidential meetings with counterparts from Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, and the SADC. The Tripartite Plus

Commission with Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi is scheduled for September. It is unclear whether this recent spate of diplomacy vis--vis regional partners represents a new focus on Africa, or if Kabila is simply cementing ties as an elected president. End comment.

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